DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 176 582 FL 010 694

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TITLE Some Aspects of Foreigner Talk.
PUB DATE Jun 77
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Los Angeles Second Language Research Forum (1st, Los Angeles, California, February 11-13, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Data Collection; *Discourse Analysis; Error Analysis (Language); Language Patterns; *Language Processing; *Language Research; Language Usage; *Language Variation; Learning Theories; Linguistic Theory; Phonology; Psycholinguistics; *Research Methodology; *Second Language Learning; Speech Communication; Syntax
IDENTIFIERS *Foreigner Talk

ABSTRACT

Foreigner talk (FT) is the term used to characterize possible adjustments in the speech of a native speaker (NS) when he or she is in conversation with a non-native speaker (NNS). The paper examines conversations between 6 native speakers and 3 non-native speakers and characterizes the speech of the native-speakers involved. The data were collected in two stages: (1) a recording was made of 3 five-minute NS-NNS conversations on a pre-determined topic; and (2) a follow-up interview of the NS by the researcher to record his or her reactions to the conversations with the NNS's. Data collection procedures were found to need improvement: (1) Researchers might gather information on affective and cultural factors that might influence findings; (2) NNS subjects should include some with lower English proficiency; and (3) conditions should be as natural as possible. In the light of this study and the data collection procedures, a review of research by Ferguson; Hatch, Shapira and Gough; and Valdman revealed some similarities and some differences. A number of general strategies cited by Hatch et al. were found, but not the kind of syntactic simplification described in the literature reviewed. In addition to the methodological considerations on data collection, it is suggested that examination of the data be carried out following the framework of conversational analysis. (AMH)

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Some Aspects of Foreigner Talk

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1. Introduction.

Foreigner Talk (FT) is the term used to characterize possible adjustments in the speech of a native speaker (NS) when he is in conversation with a non-native speaker (NNS). Study in this area could be of value to the field of second language acquisition for several reasons. Charles Ferguson (1975) made the claim that the examination of FT could give us insight into the process of simplification of language, i.e. into the basic, simple, deep structures of language. He also mentioned that it could be beneficial in understanding the process of pidginization. Another major justification for this study is that FT is input to the second language learner and the significance of input to the learner has already been shown (Gough and Hatch, 1975; Larsen-Freeman, 1976). Preliminary analysis of FT was carried out by Ferguson (1975); Hatch, Shapira and Gough (1975) continued the study under more realistic discourse conditions; and Valdman (1976) examined FT from a more sociolinguistic point of view. This paper continues the study of FT by examining conversations between NS's and NNS's and characterizing the speech of those NS's.

2. Design.

On two consecutive days during the first week of the fall quarter, 1976, a pilot study was conducted to gather NS-NNS conversational data. Six NS's and three NNS's were taped in pairs while they had short conversations for a total of eighteen conversations. (Due to technical difficulties three of these conversations were lost.)

2.1 Subjects.

The NNS's in the study were from ESL classes at UCLA. They included one twenty-six year old Iranian male from UCLA-ESL class 33A, one twenty-four year old Japanese male from ESL 33B and one twenty-four year old Japanese female from ESL 33C. With the exception of the 33C student who had been in the States for over three years, the other two had been in the U.S. just over two weeks at the time of data collection.

The NS's included four females and two males. Two of the females and one of the males were experienced ESL instructors at UCLA. The remaining NS's were TESL Certificate candidates who professed to have had little experience in speaking with NNS's.

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2.2 Procedures.

The data were collected on two separate days with three of the NS's taking part on the first day and three on the second. Each was assigned to a separate room with a researcher who controlled the tape recorders and took notes. NNS's rotated from NS to NS at five minute intervals. There was a different list of three topics each in each room. The NS and the NNS were to choose one topic from the list or any other topic of mutual interest and have a short conversation about it.

At the time the plans were made for collecting data, we felt that the use of pre-chosen topics would yield a more varied data base. We feared that, if left on their own, each pair of NS's and NNS's would talk about the same things and that the NNS would rely on learned routines, such as where the NNS was from and how long he/she had been here. We also felt that the process of choosing a topic would be of interest in itself.

There were two tape recorders in each room. One was used to tape the NS-NNS conversations and one was used to tape a follow-up discussion involving the researcher and the NS. After the three five-minute conversations, the researcher interviewed the NS to record his/her reactions to the conversations with the NNS's and to his/her own speech in the conversations. During these discussions, the previously taped NS-NNS conversations were replayed and the NS was given the opportunity to comment on his/her own speech as well as that of the NNS.

2.3 Critique of the data collection procedures.

We offer the following discussion of our data collection procedures to illustrate the kinds of limitations which may be found in our data and to enable others to consider and hopefully avoid such limitations.

First in a general vein, we have come to feel that before researchers set out to gather data on foreigner talk, they should obtain certain kinds of information about the individuals used in the study. These might include the degree to which a subject is outgoing, the individual's rate of speech and the degree to which the subject displays patience. Also the NNS's cultural background may influence the interaction as well as his reactions to topics which are discussed. Any or all of these factors might influence the findings of a study on foreigner talk. Secondly, in the interest of comparing our subjects with those of other researchers, in particular Hatch et al, we wish we had included some NNS subjects with generally lower English proficiency. Had we done so, we might also have been able to speak more directly to the findings of Hatch et al.

Many of our remaining comments center around the artificiality of stimuli and of the environment in the study. In

spite of the fact that we believe that much of what we observed in our data reflects NS-NNS conversation in the real world, we wish that the conditions under which our observations were made had been more natural.

The first problem concerns the limitations imposed on the interactions by the physical environment and logistics of the design. In each instance, the NS remained in a small office with a researcher and the tape recorders while the NNS moved from room to room. The limitations in this arrangement can be viewed both from the standpoint of the NNS and from that of the NS. It is possible that the NNS, especially in the case of less advanced speakers of English, may have been intimidated by the surroundings and by the fact that he/she was the newcomer in each conversational interaction; in each situation, the NNS had to walk into the office where there were two native speakers, be introduced, sit down and begin talking. We feel that this constituted a potentially uncomfortable situation for the NNS. Conversely, the NS seemed to have an advantage in that he/she remained in one room in the company of the researcher who was in most cases a friend or colleague. Furthermore, due to his/her stationary position, we feel that the NS may have viewed his/her role as that of host or interviewer and thus may have felt more obliged to assume a more active role in keeping the conversation going.

The second major problem has to do with the timing of the interaction. Each NS-NNS conversation began and ended within five minutes. These artificial time constraints made it necessary for some to continue talking when they might have stopped sooner and for others to stop just as a new topic was beginning.

Another artificial aspect of the interaction involved asking the participants to agree on one of the three preselected topics. In some cases the topics seemed to act more as a deterrent rather than as a stimulus. In any case, the topics detracted greatly from the naturalness of the interactions.

In the interest of gathering more natural conversational interaction between NS's and NNS's, it would seem desirable to attempt to find natural situations where NS's and NNS's might come together and talk for unspecified lengths of time about whatever they choose. Some organizations, like the International Student Center at UCLA, provide opportunities for NS's and NNS's to get together for conversations; permission might be obtained from the participants to tape these interactions. Another more natural opportunity might be found in situations where NS's have friends who are NNS's; these parties could be taped or other arrangements might be made bringing together a mutual firend of either party permitting other NS-NNS c nversations. After taping such conversations, researchers could examine all or only part of the interaction.

3. Review of literature.

3.1 Charles Ferguson, 'Toward a characterization of English foreigner talk'.

Ferguson has examined what he calls conventional simplified speech, used when the speaker does not think the hearer will fully comprehend the language. In his work specifically about FT, Ferguson elicited ten sample sentences of FT by means of a written questionnaire given to a university sociolinguistics class. The subjects were given ten sentences and were asked to write down how they thought the sentences would be rephrased by someone speaking to uneducated non-Europeans. They were then asked questions about their attitudes toward the use of this type of speech. He also reviewed a C.S. Lewis novel, Out of the Silent Planet, for examples of the speech of an English speaker speaking a foreign language badly, which he refers to as an extended use of FT. In the novel, an Englishman lands on Mars and, for attitudinal reasons, does not learn the Martian language very well. His communication with the Martians then is representative, Ferguson believes, of English FT.

From this corpus of data, Ferguson formed an extensive linguistic characterization of FT. He found his subjects, for example, omitting the copula, articles and redundant morphemes. They also made use of expansions such as tags and reduplication. There were further instances of lexical substitution. For example, understand was replaced by savvy and tomorrow by next day. Such examples of adjustment in syntax do not occur in our data.

Ferguson himself suggests that his data is limited and that it was collected under artificial conditions. We attempted to collect more natural data. We wanted to get away from any written form of language. FT is after all, talk, and should be collected as such. Our subjects were also students, but the data collection did not take place in a classroom setting and performance by the subjects had absolutely nothing to do with the need to perform well for a course. We had our NS subjects actually take part in discourse with NNS's in order to gather less hypothetical data. These data would represent FT as opposed to another phenomenon that might or might not be representative of FT. Our goal then was to further examine Ferguson's thesis with a more realistic corpus.

3.2 Evelyn Hatch, Rina Shapira and Judy Gough, '"Foreigner talk" discourse'.

Hatch, Shapira and Gough devoted a considerable portion of their paper on foreigner talk to the ways in which the syntax of the NS's, specifically Rina and the ESL teacher, reflected that of the NNS's. Although Rina's speech was different than Zoila's, the NNS's, there were notable similarities in the deletion of it, in the absence of tense marking and in

the use of no + verb negation. The ESL teacher's "foreigner talk" included such characteristics of his students' speech as it and copula deletion, systematic modifications in negation and absence of plural markers.

In looking at the speech of other NS's in telephone conversations with NNS's, Hatch, Shapira and Gough found no distinct syntactic patterns which could be said to generally characterize their foreigner talk. Instead of syntactic similarities, they observed a variety of strategies, some of which were more representative of an individual NS. Among the more commonly observed strategies were frequent repetition and restatement with the use of synonyms, slower delivery, clearer articulation and a general feeling of empathy for the NNS's. Other individual strategies included using heavy stress, using long pauses to allow the NNS to indicate whether he/she had understood, using confirmation checks such as "Do you understand?", and attempting to anticipate and complete the NNS's utterances.

Although our analysis is incomplete, we find very little in the way of NS syntactic patterns that would suggest that a NS's grammar reflects that of the NNS. There may be several reasons for this. One may be that our NNS were more advanced than those in the above study. Another may be that some NS's never exhibit this aspect of FT and by chance the Hatch et al telephone conversations and our data involved this type of NS. A third reason may be that a NS involved in a short conversation with a stranger may not exhibit this kind of FT but he might if he had frequent contacts with this particular NNS over a longer period of time. For example, would Rina's first five mintues of speech with Zoila have reflected Zoila's syntax to the extent it did later when the tapes were made?

We did find a few examples of variant syntax in our data, but these instances neither followed a pattern in the NS's speech nor reflected that of a given NNS. We observed a number of strategies in our NS subjects which parallel those of the NS subjects in the Hatch et al telephone conversations. Repetition is found, but in our data repeated utterances are usually somewhat altered with expansions occurring more frequently than reduction as is shown in the following two examples:

(1) NS: ...Is that close, I don't know, is that close to campus?

(2) NS: ...tha' way you don't have to worry about cars.
NS: That way- living on the dorm, you don't have to worry about cars. (1.5) About having a car for transportation.

In such expansions, we often observe an increase in redundancy.

Restatements are also frequent in our data:

(3) NS: What are you going to do with the math that you're studying.
(.3)
NNS: Oh:::: P-H-D= (.3) //No//
NS: =.hhh //No// arya gonna getta doctorate's //degree//
NNS: //yeh //
NS: But whadiya plan (.8) howdiya plan on using the math (.7) Like arya gonna be a math teac[illegible] (.7) Orr:::

The use of definitions and synonyms is also [illegible]on:

(4) NS: Do the buses breakdown very often?
NNS: (.8)
NNS: Breakdown?
NS: Uhuhm: Do they stop running?

3.3 Albert Valdman, 'L'effet de modeles cultuerls sur l'elaboration du Langage Simplifie (Foreigner Talk)'.

The thrust of Valdman's paper is that there are various forms of FT within a linguistic community and whether or not a form of FT is used by a NS will depend on his perception, not of the linguistic competence of the NNS, as we might first think, but of the social group the NNS belongs to.

He first examined FT collected in a lycee in South Viet Nam and compared it to the interlanguage (IL) spoken by five South Vietnamese. If anything, the FT (referred to as Tay Boi) was more "simplified" than the IL collected. For example, in the FT the verb sequences consisted of one infinitive followed by another, tense-aspect was not marked in the AUX, and only pronominal forms which can carry stress were used. Whereas in the IL examples, the situation was more complex: inflected verb forms did appear, tense-aspect was protrayed by adverbials, and there was a greater range of pronouns used, both stressed and some unstressed forms. In any case, the IL reflected the competence of the speaker. Thus Valman concluded that FT does not reflect IL as much as it should if the hypothesis that NS's adjust their language to their interlocutor's IL were true.

Unfortunately, the presentation did not state that the FT data and IL data were collected from the same NS and NNS conversations, and NS data is not matched to NNS data. If they were not drawn from 1:1 conversations, it is impossible to say how a NS could have been influenced by the competence of the NNS.

Nonetheless, Valdman believes that it is not the competence of the NNS but the attitudes held by the NS toward the NNS (in a sociological sense) that influence the kind of FT he uses.

He found support for this view in literature. He compared the kinds of FT put into the mouths of characters when they are talking to various NNS's of French, e.g., domestics,

porters and guides (some syntactic changes), Lamas, priests and magicians (Standard French), white foreigners (phonological changes only), Indians and Asians (syntactic changes), and black Africans (greatest syntactic reduction coupled with phonological simplification).

Certainly his examples point to stereotypes which exist for some and possibly many people. But whether these will hold up in natural situations is another question.

He recognized the need to investigate this further, and proposed to ask university students how the average Frenchman might best make himself understood to 1) a Western student, 2) an Asiatic tourist, 3) an immigrant Portuguese laborer, and 4) an immigrant African laborer.

Our taped conversations showed no systematic syntactic or phonological changes in an NS's speech toward any of the NNS's, so we are unable to give evidence of cultural bias affecting FT. One NS gave us a gratuitous opinion of one NNS's language problems (as related to his culture), and if the negative attitudes were the major factor influencing FT we should have seen changes in the NS's syntax and phonology. But we didn't. It could be argued, however, that Americans do not have cultural-bound forms of FT, but that French people do. Possibly the size and homogeniety of France compared to the U.S. would be a factor if this were claimed.

Our own experience leads us to conclude that Valdman would better spend his energies recording average Frenchmen talking to NNS's of different competence and backgrounds than asking a third-party, university students, how the average Frenchman would speak in these situations. In asking his subjects to differentiate among groups of NNS's, the likelihood is increased that subjects will indeed make such a differentiation. If bias is truely a factor, it will occur in such natural conversations in a systematic way. In any case, he would at least be dealing with the reality of conversations.

4. Observations.

In our data we observed a number of general strategies cited by Hatch et al; however, we did not find the kind of syntactic simplification described by Ferguson, Hatch et al and Valdman. More precisely we did not find instances of cupula or it deletion, missing tense markers, absence of plurals, etc.

Elsewhere Hatch (1976) found that in NS repair or reformulation of a question which the NNS has not understood, that the NS may not necessarily simplify the syntax but instead may reduce the work of the NNS in terms of what must be produced to answer the question. In this regard, Hatch gave examples of WH-questions being repaired as yes/no questions, as OR choice questions and as questions plus a possible answer.

(5) WH-Q repaired as yes/no question
How is your team? Is your team very good? Why not? Oh, is it too far?

(6) WH-Q repaired as an OR choice question
No, how does it go, do they play like this or like this?

(7) Question plus possible answer
What else is good over there? The Haunted House?
(Hatch, p. 25)

We also found evidence of reformulation of questions which require less in terms of NNS production:

(8) WH-Q repaired as yes/no question
NS: What is it? Does it have a name.

(9) yes/no question repaired as OR choice question
NS: So arya gonna look for another apartment?...No, arya going to look for another one? Orya gonna stay there.

While such examples occurred frequently, we saw no fixed patterns emerging. We also found evidence of WH-questions repaired as other WH-questions and yes/no questions repaired as WH-questions. The following sequence seems to run the gamut of possibilities:

(10) NS: Mm-hm. What's- what are you gonna do. You have any uh plans about a career?
NNS: What? Please repeat.
NS: Uh, a job? What, what are you planning to do with the mathematics. How are you going to uh use the mathematics. You gonna go back to uh, Iran and get a technical job?

It is interesting to note that in several conversations, different NS's used yes/no questions almost exclusively. On one hand this may lead one to believe that the NS was reducing the demands on the NNS in terms of what had to be produced as a response. On the other hand we feel that before such statements can be made, one needs to have a better understanding of the question strategies a given NS employs, in particular the kinds of shifts in question form which are associated with NS repair strategies in NS-NS conversation. Certainly repair strategies in NS-NNS interaction provide many possibilities for further study, but it is advisable to gather data on individual NS's interacting with other NS's before making generalizations about their strategies with NNS's.

In examining our data we felt that in nearly all conversations, with the exception of conversations with the most advanced speaker, the NS's seemed to carry the responsibility of keeping the conversation going. This observation has often led us to refer to the conversations as interviews. The term "interview", however, may be misleading, for one might expect the NS to be providing questions and the NNS doing most of the talking. This was not the case; the NS's did most of the talking (except, again, in the case of the most advanced NNS).

We tried several approaches in order to characterize what we felt was the more dominant role of the NS in the conversations. First, we tried counting NS questions vs NNS questions. The contrasting figures were at times overwhelming as in the case of one NS with three NNS's:

(11) NS questions: 30 NS questions: 46
Beginning NNS questions: 3 Intermed. NNS questions: 16

NS questions: 36
Advanced NNS questions: 5

We also tried counting the number of words uttered by each NS and NNS in each conversation and found a progression; as the competency of the NNS decreased, the percentage of words uttered by the NS increased. Such techniques as counting questions and words, however, yield only the grossest kinds of information. Questions vary from information requests, to repairs, to repair initiators, to utterances which resemble questions in form but which do not function as questions at a all. Utterances need instead to be looked at interactionally, i.e. in terms of function and in terms of how they are positioned in the conversation. Counting words is based on arbitrary decisions and produces dubious results. To illustrate this point, conceivably the NNS could produce a syntactically incomplete statement which might then be filled out in a restatement and further commented on by the NS. This could greatly inflate the NS word count and it would not really tell us very much about the interaction.

The difficulties we had in characterizing the global aspects of the conversations have led us ultimately to believe that the only meaningful and productive way to study foreigner talk is through conversational analysis following the me methodology of Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974) and others. As novices in this field, we are unable to offer an in-depth analysis of our conversations. We have begun to reexamine our data and in a preliminary way, we find two aspects worth discussing here.

First, the majority of the interaction between the two parties in these conversations was reflected by questions and their answers as demonstrated in the example below.

(12)

NS: Whadiya studying t' do? (2.0) here.	(first pair part--question)	adjacency pair
NNS: ohyewhu (.5) masematics.	(second pair part--answer)	
NS: uh-huh--arya gonna go back t' Japan with that?	(first pair part--question)	adjacency pair
NNS: O:f course	(second pair part--answer)	

In this example we see that the NS determined the direction of the talk, and took the responsibility of continuing the conversation. Perhaps this can be illustrated by a comparison

to a modified game of tennis. The NS served the tennis ball by asking a question (referred to in conversational analysis as a first pair part), the NNS returned the serve by answering the question (second pair part) thus completing the play (an adjacency pair). This sequence begins again and is repeated. These adjacency pairs are described as serially organized.

Sometimes our data showed the same serially organized adjacency pairs with the NNS initiating the questions and the NS responding.

(13)		
NNS: ahyou fro:m Am'rica::?	(first pair part--question)	adjacency pair
NS: Yeah, yea:h I'm fro:m the east coast. From-uh- the state of Virginia.	(second pair part--answer)	
NNS: (yeah.) .hh Where is it?	(first pair part--question)	adjacency pair
NS: Virginia? U:m is on the east coast...	(second pair part--answer)	

But by far the majority of such serially organized adjacency pairs was initiated by the NS.

An alternative organizational pattern of questions and answers, a pattern referred to as interlocking adjacency pair organization, is exemplified below.

(14) ((re: Disneyland))		
NNS: Oh is it nice? for you? (laughter)//Di-uh-* Disneyland.	(first pair part--question)	adjacency pair
NS: WhaDisneyland?*	(second pair part--answer PLUS first pair part--question)	adjacency pair
NS: O:h yeah sure it's fun for ever'body. I- take it you've gone? once?		
NNS: Oh, I-I wish to go-o.	(second pair part--answer)	

To refer again to our modified tennis analogy, the NNS served the ball, the NS returned his serve, and immediately thereafter in a sense took away the ball and served it himself, making up a turn consisting of two components: an answer followed by an interlocking question. The NNS then returned that serve, thus completing the play.

We found no examples of this organization with the NNS producing two components in one turn, with those two components being a second pair part answer followed by a first pair part question.

One qualitative difference between interlocking organization (14) and serial organization (13) is that the former furthers the conversation by requiring another response, whereas serial organization does not. In noting that a preponderance of serially organized adjacency pairs are initiated by the NS as well as that interlocking adjacency pairs are only

initiated by the NS, we see that the NS is performing more work in furthering the conversation than the NNS.

The second conversational phenomenon concerns the use of continuers, words such as uhuh, yeh, and I see, which when used by a participant in a conversation indicate his continued attention. We saw a progression across NNS's in that the degree to which they used continuers corresponded to their competence. In the data we examined, the least advanced NNS's seldom used continuers, while the most advanced speaker used them extensively. When the NS had no indication that the NNS was attending, we had the impression that the NS struggled to keep the conversation going.

(15)
NS: I see. I see (1.5) um (1.0) I think Marilyn was saying that - - ((creaky voice)) Communism was very bad in Turkey also very (1.0) nobody likes it (.2) If you have a book with a red cover he he hhh .hhh they take it away from you .hhh when you come into the country (.3) because it might be communist (.5) book. (.8) things like that. you know. I don't know. It's just strange (1.8) uh I guess it's understandable if they're right next door (.2) to Russia. to be worried (.6) right Russia's // conquer everything (.8)
NNS: (hhh)
NS: try to take as satellites all countries. (.hhh) I don't know (1.0) but (1.8)
NNS: Where are you from.

In an attempt to ascertain what aspects of FT the NS's were conscious of, they were asked to comment about their speech to the investigators immediately after the conversations were taped and also while listening to a replay of their conversations. This procedure did bring forth a few insights.

All of the NS's noted difficulty and discomfort in speaking with the beginning NNS, and relief and pleasure in speaking with the most advanced NNS. Some of the NS's cited specific places where they felt compelled to opt for another lexical item rather than the one which first came to mind. For example:

(16)
NS: I tried to be as clear as I could. And-uh, ther's one time where, uh, I was gonna say that Disneyland's a real trip, y'know, but, I didn't wanna lay that on him. So, I- I tried to be as unidiomatic as possible.

And in the corresponding transcript we find:

(17) ((re: Disneyland))
NS: I- I take it you've gone" once?
NNS: Oh, I-I wish to go-o.
NS: Oh you do. Well you should try to. It's-a it's-a, it's really an experience.

This indicates that the NS is able to exercise some conscious control over his vocabulary choice.

Other claims made by the NS subjects did not hold true under later analysis of the data. One subject claimed that he avoided the use of contractions, but in fact, there are many occurrences of them in his speech. It would seem that the speakers are not always aware of much of what happens in their own speech.

A serious drawback in this entire procedure is that in asking the subjects to focus and comment on a certain piece of discourse, they may have been encouraged to interpret some reasoning into it that they otherwise might not have considered. Ferguson found that most of his subjects considered FT condescending or a hinderance to learning. To the extent that a person feels this way, his perception of his own speech may be affected or it may result in a reluctance to discuss his own speech. For these reasons, we do not consider our attempt at assessing the extent of self-awareness of FT as being successful and we are not sure that this is at all possible to accomplish. Furthermore, conversational analysts oppose attempts to assess speaker motivation and speaker self-awareness. They advocate the description of actual interaction based on tapes and transcripts of natural events. We believe at this point that there is more to be gained from a characterization of actual conversations between NS's and NNS's than from attempts to tap self-awareness.

5. Conclusion.

In conclusion, we would like to reiterate those methodological considerations gained from this work, considerations that we suggest be followed in further study of FT. First, data should be gathered according to natural collection methods. The researcher should look for places where NS's and NNS's converse and spend time together, and tape willing subjects there. Furthermore, the speech habits of a NS when he/she converses with NNS's should be compared to his speech habits when he/she speaks with other NS's, i.e. the distinction should be made between FT and the idiosyncratic speech of the NS. Finally, examination of the data should be carried out following the framework of conversational analysis. The speech of the NS should be observed as a part of the interaction that occurs between that NS and the NNS because the dynamics of conversational interaction between two people itself affects the utterances of either participant, in the case of NS-NNS conversations, the resulting FT.

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